

# PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

## Santa Clara County Preparations

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department is working with other local, state and federal agencies to respond to pandemic influenza and to maintain essential health care and community services. In fact, governments all around the world are preparing for the possibility of a flu pandemic under the leadership of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization.

This information is being provided to help keep you informed about the possibility of a flu pandemic. If a pandemic happens, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department will be the local agency responsible for guiding local medical response and providing health related public information.

## What is Pandemic Influenza?

Influenza (flu) viruses cause infections of the respiratory tract (breathing tubes and lungs). In some people, the complications of influenza can be severe, including pneumonia.

Pandemic flu is a worldwide outbreak of a new strain of influenza virus. Because this new virus has not been seen before, most if not all people will not have any immunity (protection) against it.

## How is Pandemic Flu Different from Regular, Seasonal Flu?

A pandemic flu virus has little or nothing in common with the flu viruses we get every year. A pandemic flu would be a new strain of a potentially much more serious virus and would affect many more people. While there is a vaccine for seasonal flu, there is no vaccine currently available to protect you against a new pandemic flu.

## Why is Pandemic Flu So Serious?

Most or all people would not have immunity to a new pandemic flu virus. Because of this, it is likely that large numbers of people around the world would be infected. Once a pandemic flu develops, it would quickly cause illness around the world. The CDC predicts that 25% to 30% of the US population could become ill.

## Can Pandemic Flu be Prevented?

It is not possible to prevent or stop a pandemic once it begins. A person infected with the pandemic flu virus can be contagious for 24 hours before symptoms begin to show and for up to 14 days after. This makes it very easy for the virus to spread quickly to large numbers of people.

Although the federal government is stockpiling medical supplies and antiviral drugs, no country in the world has enough antiviral drugs to protect all their citizens. Antiviral drugs can be used to treat severe cases as long as the virus does not become resistant to the drugs. Antiviral drugs would be given first to health care workers and first responders such as emergency services personnel, fire and police. Once a vaccine is available, vaccinations of these workers would be a priority. This would be done because these people would be called upon to contain the spread of the disease, care for and transport patients, and provide essential services.

Other strategies for slowing the spread of flu pandemic could include temporarily closing schools, sports arenas, theaters, restaurants, taverns, and other public gathering places and facilities. These actions would be taken to stop the disease from spreading further.

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# *(Continued)* PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

## **Why isn't there a Vaccine?**

There currently is no vaccine to protect humans against a pandemic flu virus because the strain of pandemic flu virus is not yet known. However, vaccine development efforts are under way to protect humans against a pandemic flu virus that might evolve from the current bird flu in Asia.

## **When is an Influenza Pandemic Expected?**

It is not possible to predict accurately when a pandemic flu will occur or how severe it may be. Flu pandemics occur naturally and there have been three (3) pandemics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The pandemic of 1918-19 was the most severe pandemic on record. More than 50 million people around the world died, including about 650,000 Americans.

The current outbreak of avian influenza in Asia has flu experts concerned that a pandemic is likely to happen and that it may be quite severe.

## **Why Does the Current Bird Flu Outbreak in Southeast Asia Pose Such a Risk?**

The current bird flu outbreak in Asia, spread by wild birds to domestic chickens and ducks, is widespread. Human infections and deaths due to bird flu have occurred from direct contact with infected chickens. The virus has not yet developed the ability to easily pass from person-to-person. If the current bird flu changes so that it infects more humans and spreads easily from person-to-person, it will likely cause a worldwide pandemic of influenza in humans.

## **What Can I Do to be Prepared?**

By preparing for a pandemic flu you can reduce your chances of getting sick and help limit the spread of disease.

Stay informed. Keep up-to-date on a possible flu pandemic by listening to radio & television, and reading news stories about pandemic flu. Visit the Web sites provided for updated information about pandemic flu.

Stop germs from spreading. By doing a few simple things you can stop the spread of germs and viruses:

- Wash your hands often using soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Put used tissues in the trash and then wash your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick and stay away from others as much as possible.
- Keep sick children home from school.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

If you have general questions about pandemic influenza, please contact the Public Health Information Line at 408.885.3980. Public Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### **Websites on Pandemic Influenza**

[www.sccphd.org](http://www.sccphd.org) Santa Clara County Public Health Department for general information on pandemic flu.

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for general information about pandemic flu and other health related information.

[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for updates on national and international pandemic flu.

